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ABSTRACT

School enrollment is increasing in record numbers but the average public school is 42 years old, rapidly deteriorating, and technologically inadequate. The President's FY2000 budget includes two proposals for the nation's public school modernization: $25 billion in bonds for school construction and renovation (up to 6000 public schools); and $10 billion to design schools as centers of the community. Modernization bond qualifications are listed. (GR)

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Modernizing America's Schools For The 21st Century

School modernization is urgently needed across the nation to accommodate increasing enrollments, to repair crumbling schools, to allow for smaller class sizes, and to ensure that all schools are accessible and well-equipped for the 21st century.

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- Today, a record 52.7 million children are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, and this number will climb to 54.3 million by 2008.
- The average public school in America is 42 years old, and school buildings begin rapid deterioration after 40 years, according NCES data released in January. In addition, 30 percent of all public schools are in the "oldest condition" -- built before 1970 and never renovated or renovated before 1980.
- The oldest schools are also lagging behind other schools in the push to connect to the Internet. While almost 60 percent of schools built since 1985 were connected to the Internet in 1995, only 42 percent of schools in the oldest condition were connected to the Internet.

The President's FY2000 budget includes two proposals to help modernize America's schools:

$25 BILLION IN BONDS FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

This proposal provides Federal tax credits to pay the interest on nearly $25 billion in bonds to build and renovate up to 6,000 public schools. Two types of bonds are being proposed: School Modernization Bonds ($22.4 billion) and Qualified Zone Academy Bonds ($2.4 billion). The tax credits on these bonds will cost the Treasury $3.7 billion over 5 years.

School Modernization Bonds: $22 billion in School Modernization Bonds would be available over two years ($11 billion in 2000 and $11 billion in 2001) for construction and renovation of public school facilities. Federal tax credits will pay the interest on these bonds. $11 billion in bonds would be available to 100 school districts serving the largest number of low-income children. $11 billion in bonds would be available to States. States will have the flexibility to distribute bonds to districts according to their own assessment of need across the State.

To qualify for the bonds, States and districts would submit to the Secretary of Education: (1) a new or recent study of the construction and repair needs in the jurisdiction, (2) a description of how the bond funds

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will be used for the purposes intended by this proposal; and, for States only, (3) a description of how highest priority will be given to localities with greatest needs and how special consideration will be given to rural and high-growth areas.

Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZABs): Created in 1997, the QZAB statute provides tax credits to pay interest on bonds for a variety of educational expenses (including building renovation) related to public school-business partnerships in Empowerment Zones and low-income areas. The Administration's proposal would make available to States $2.4 billion in QZABs ($1 billion in 2000 and $1.4 billion in 2001), and it would expand QZABs to cover new school construction.

New Native American School component: The Administration's proposal also includes $400 million in School Modernization Bonds for Native American schools ($200 million in 2000, $200 million in 2001). The Secretary of Interior would make bonds available to tribal governments for construction and repair of BIA-funded schools.

$10 MILLION TO DESIGN SCHOOLS AS CENTERS OF COMMUNITY

Involving teachers, parents, students and community groups in the planning and design of new schools can spark innovation and can produce multiple benefits such as financial savings through cost sharing and maximum use of the school facility as the center of community. This $10 million proposal would provide competitive grants to support community partnerships with local school boards to encourage broader citizen engagement in developing a school system master plan or an individual school site space and design plan.

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